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SUBJECT: OBASANJO SHOULD RESIGN CLAIMS CIVIL SOCIETY GROUP,  
UNITED ACTION FOR DEMOCRACY

REF: (A) LAGOS 2200 (B) LAGOS 2322 (C) LAGOS 2330

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Civil society organizations continue to agitate on the national scene in an attempt to realize public policy and institutional reform, but have yet to produce real movement in that direction. Calls for protest against the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) appear to be hollow, and possible disruptions will likely be minimal -- if noticeable at all. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) United Action for Democracy (UAD) has called for President Obasanjo to resign from office, claiming that Obasanjo "has not listened to public opinion" and runs a government akin to a "military dictatorship." UAD has also "advised" heads of state not to attend CHOGM scheduled for December 3-6 in Abuja, but claims that they will not "blackmail" the high profile event. The group argues that Nigeria is not fit to host the event under the present administration, which it claims came into office through electoral fraud. It also renewed its criticism of Obasanjo's recent policies and slow or nonexistent implementation of democratization (Refs A, B, and C). UAD claims that forty-six other organizations are collaborating with it in this effort. However, it is important to note that the National Labour Congress (NLC), UAD's partner in the Labour and Civil Society Organization (LASCO) in protesting the GON's recent fuel deregulation, is visibly absent, as is LASCO itself.

13. (SBU) POLOFF spoke with Bamidele Aturu, president of UAD, on 13 November. Aturu, who is also the co-chairman of LASCO, told us UAD will hold a symposium in Lagos on November 18 for member NGOs to discuss the state of Nigeria's democracy. Time and venue had not yet been determined, but Aturu said he is expecting one hundred persons to attend. Aturu also announced that a rally is planned for December 3, the opening day of CHOGM, in the Yaba district of Lagos. Other rallies are promised nation-wide, including Abuja, but plans for these other events are not yet firm. As with fuel deregulation, the largest complaint of UAD and other civil society organizations is that the GON regularly fails to consult with them before it implements public policy that affects their constituencies. They complain that Obasanjo's style of government is little different than that of a military dictatorship and they have begun to advocate impeachment as a means to remove him from office.

14. (SBU) POLOFF's counterpart at the British Deputy High Commission told her last week that HRM Queen Elizabeth II will arrive in Abuja on December 3 to officially open CHOGM and will stay in Abuja for the entire conference, departing on December 6. Her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, will accompany the Queen to Abuja, but has also scheduled a visit to Lagos. Prime Minister Tony Blair is scheduled to arrive December 4 and will depart on December 8. When informed by POLOFF of the possibility of UAD rallies in Abuja during the Queen's stay, the BDHC did not express concern.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Bamidele Aturu, who appeared to have left the human rights struggle in Nigeria after the fall of the Abacha regime, has become visible again in the past two months, making many statements urging civil disobedience. To date, there has been no public response in the form of demonstrations or protests on the issues that he raises. His criticisms of the government may have intellectual merit, but little application or efficacy in the Nigerian body politic. In a society that even Obasanjo himself describes as always pursuing "position, power, possession, plaudits, popularity, and pleasure", it is possible that Aturu is positioning himself on the national stage for self-aggrandizement, as well as forwarding his philosophies. Regardless of Aturu's personal motives, the increased activity of civil society organizations is a positive sign of the continuing

democratization of Nigeria.

16. (SBU) The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) comprising civil society have in general been seeking to define themselves since the fall of the Abacha regime. With the menace of military dictatorship no longer looming on the horizon, their identities are yet to be solidified. Although these NGOs were able to effectively organize against Obasanjo's fuel deregulation policy, under the leadership of LASCO they were unable to follow through and effect change. While these NGO leaders philosophize and advocate privately and within their own circles, their calls have yet to resonate loudly among the Nigerian public. END COMMENT.  
HINSON-JONES